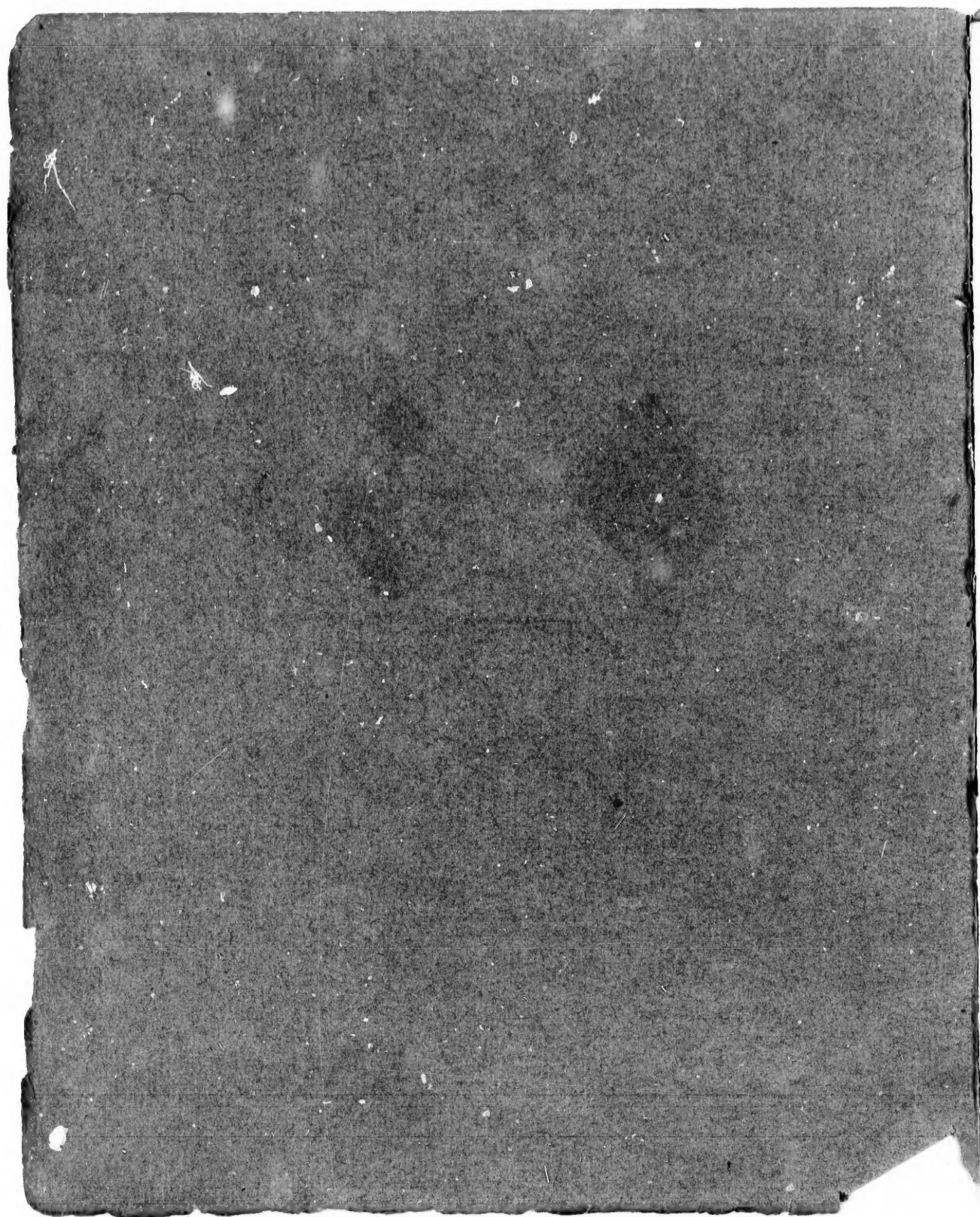
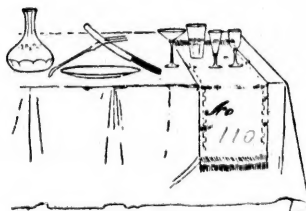


1704



THE
REPULSE OF BEAUCOURT
AN EPISODE
OF
NEW ENGLAND HISTORY

VERSES READ AT THE ANNUAL DINNER OF THE COLONIAL SOCIETY
OF MASSACHUSETTS, AT THE HOUSE OF THE ALGONQUIN
CLUB, BOSTON, NOVEMBER 21, 1894



"— rosam mensis hospes suspendit amicis
Convivae ut sub ea dicta facienda sciant"

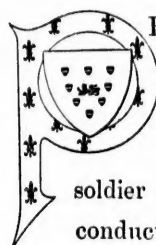
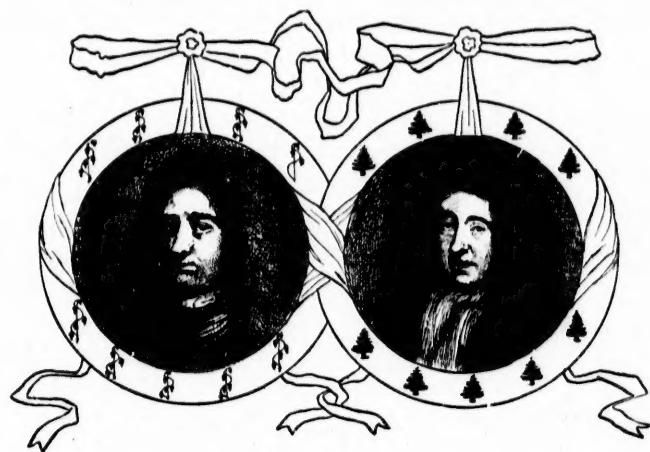
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HILIPPE DE RIGAUD, Marquis de Vaudreuil, who succeeded De Callières as Governor of Montreal and eventually as Governor-General of New France, though not so distinguished a soldier as his predecessor, showed great ability in the conduct of military affairs during the protracted and sanguinary struggle between New England and New France, familiarly known as Queen Anne's War.

Like the fierce contests in Europe for the establishment of the Spanish Succession, the hostile encounters between the French and English in America, though equally barren of profitable results, were signalized by achievements which, if on a large scale and exposed to general observation, would have held a place in history

side by side with the glorious events of Blenheim and Ramillies. Of these comparatively insignificant provincial encounters, however, only obscure rumors reached the public ear of Europe; and here, at home, all the details of the organization and conduct of the forces that stealthily passed and repassed the border on their errands of murder and rapine, or which met in open conflict during those dark and sorrowful years, would have passed into final oblivion but for the horrible barbarities perpetrated by the savage allies of the French, of which almost every frontier settlement of New England had an experience that could not fade from local tradition, nor fail to become a matter of record.

Vaudreuil, ably seconded by the Seigneur de Beauharnois at Quebec (Intendant, and, as such, practically at the head of civil affairs), matured a plan for attacking the outlying settlements of Massachusetts by successive expeditions sent out under the lead of his most courageous, enterprising, and persevering officers, primarily in the hope of relieving the miserable condition of his own people, but with the ultimate design of subjugating the English, or at least of capturing Boston. The rank and file were mainly savages, over whom he claimed no power of control except by persuasion and example.

The well-known practices of savage warfare added new terrors to the prospect of these hostile incursions. From

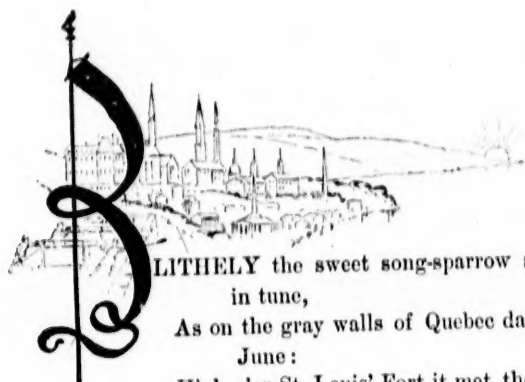
their frightful work it was certain the invaders would return with the bleeding scalps of English men, women, and children, and with prisoners of tender age, who, if they survived the hardships of their journeys through the wilderness, were likely to become forever estranged from their natural guardians by adoption into some Indian tribe,—a source of apprehension far more poignant to the Englishman than to the Frenchman, to whom the thought of such affiliation was not so repulsive, especially when attended with the approval of the Church.

In the year 1704 (new style), three such expeditions, under different leaders, were successively sent from Canada to attack the northern and western frontier of the province. Joseph Dudley, as Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Massachusetts, and Fitz-John Winthrop, as Governor of Connecticut, had constantly exhorted the inhabitants of the frontier towns to be vigilant, and had liberally assisted them in preparing for the approach of the French and Indian enemy; and so long as their warnings were heeded, the enemy were defeated in their larger schemes, although at times some injury to property and some loss of life unavoidably ensued.

As the result of the three expeditions referred to, we have the thrilling tale of the massacre and destruction of Deerfield by a party under the *Sieur Hertel de Rouville*, on the twenty-ninth of February (old style), when the

Reverend John Williams and more than one hundred other prisoners were taken, and carried to Canada, — a calamity which might have been averted had the garrison heeded the warnings from Boston and Connecticut. Next in order was the similar though less important massacre and burning, on the thirteenth of May, of the village of Pascomuc, or Easthampton, by a party of French and Indians, led by the Sieur de Montigny; and finally, the attack and repulse at Lancaster, on the thirty-first of July.

This last is the theme of the following verses, in which, although it is not pretended that license has not been taken with regard to motives and coloring, and to actions even, the leading incidents are believed to be strictly historical.



LITHELY the sweet song-sparrow sang, with matin bells
in tune,
As on the gray walls of Quebec dawned the warm sun of
June:

High o'er St. Louis' Fort it met the golden lilies' glance
From their floating field of azure,— the gonfalon of France.

Heaven smiled above; but all around, in hut and palace hall,
Fever and famine fiercely raged, and death o'erspread its pall;
And many a squaw and Gallic *femme* watched the dull embers
burn,
Weeping her warrior consort gone,— gone, never to return.

Sleepless through weary hours, Vaudreuil, his locks with night-
dews wet,
Unmindful of the sentry's call, had trod the damp *banquette*,
Hoping 'gainst fate for aid from France, when, by the morning gun
Roused from his reverie, he turned and faced the rising sun.

Across, Point Levi's terraced plain and Orleans Island lay;
To left and north the wilderness stretched boundlessly away:
All down the stream no merchantman loomed out of the white
mist;
No pennon of a man-of-war the gleaming sunbeams kissed.

"Mother of God!" in grief he cried, "why must this longer be!
We've staked our all at thy behest; we ask return from thee!
'Tis put a paltry boon we crave — give to thy servants bread!
Thy friars and thy Ursulines, thy Jesuits, should be fed!"

Then, turning to the sentinel, word to the kitchen sped
To have with meats and salading the frugal table spread;
Next, to Beauharnois' palace gate sent he this note away:
"The Commandant entreats Monsieur to dine with him to-day."

Sad was the meeting, scant the cheer, as at that festive board
The prospects of New France they weighed,— the purse, the
scales, the sword.

Anon, Vaudreuil infuriate rose, and, speaking, paced the room:
"Unless God work a miracle, two years will seal our doom!"

"Our peasants cry in vain for food; in want our soldiers pine;
Nor salt nor bread our larders hold, nor hold our cellars wine,—
Save what the holy *frères* preserve in memory of our Lord,—
His blood,—and bread, his body, that the *religieuses* have stored.

"For ships, with merchandise full-fraught, to take our peltry home,
Only the savages' canoes, crowded with beggars, come.
Hushed is the calker's mallet-beat; no shipsmith's anvils ring;
No lumpers shout in sullied blouse, nor merry sailors sing.

"But lo! the English heretics at Massachusetts Bay,
Pampered and clothed luxuriously, live one long holiday.
From east and south their ships return laden with costly stores,—
The wares of British industry, and wines of the Azores,

"The slaves and gold of Africa, sweets from the Caribbees,
All fish from Maine to Newfoundland, and oil from Arctic seas;
And from beyond Good Hope the wealth of Mocha and Bombay,
Muslins and spice from Malabar, and silks from far Cathay.

"Their flocks' abundant fleeces yield their looms a full supply;
Their herds are fat with pasturage forced by a genial sky;
Their gardens and their fertile fields with slightest culture give
Such rich returns the indolent may comfortably live.

"Though thus enjoying affluent ease the men of Boston hold,
Unpitied, for the gallows chained, Baptiste, our sailor bold,
And scores of captive daughters and devoted sons of France, —
Enslaved, denied the holy mass, and spurned with impious taunts.

"Hear now my oath, Saint Joseph, thou, the patron of our land!
I swear to hunt these heretics with sword and flaming brand,
From mountain unto river, and from river to the sea,
And of their blood and bones to make a holocaust to thee!"

Then Beauharnois addressed he: "What does my brother say
To marshalling our forces for the sanguinary fray
This hour? Time will not serve us, should we halt or linger on;
Our farmers need to gather crops when summer's heat is gone.

"Bleaker the route De Rouville found, who out of Deerfield bore
Full forty scalps of fifty killed, and prisoners six score;
E'en now Montigny's fifty braves, with only five white men,
Have left Pascomuc's smouldering walls a reeking slaughter-pen.

"Now, you the Abenakis hold obedient to your call,
And I a still more vengeful horde of braves at Montreal;
These to our fierce Algonquins joined will make a force full strong,
If with our French to lead we send our Montagnais along.

"And mark, Monsieur, the English force now on the coast of
Maine
Is bound to distant La C  die, where it will sure remain
Until to take Port Royal's fort it makes one more essay,
And De Brouillan's assured defence will its return delay.

"Thus weakened, their defensive line along the whole frontier
Affords convenient entrance to attack them in the rear.
Now is the time to strike for Christ, his Church, and King Louis!
Send to the rendezvous your men; I start for Ville-Marie!"

Then back and forth the summons swept, sped by the bells' loud
clang,
And through the forest far and wide the cornet's clarion rang.
Painted in hideous guise and plumed, the lithe-limbed Indians flew,
Some up the stream, with whoop and scream, paddling the swift
canoe;

Some up the trail, — the highway some, where, foot and cavalier,
The flower of New France fell in, and rank to rank drew near.
Oh, 't was a fearful sight to see this motley army, led
By Vaudreuil, with the Sieur Beaucourt, lieutenant, at the head,

When drew Vaudreuil his sword, and said, "O son of Aubert's line
This blade I hold in my right hand I freely place in thine!
Thou know'st thy duty, — nor for age, nor sex, nor pity spare;
Take captives as De Rouville did, if thou canst well forbear, —

"But let no laggard invalid nor helpless babe delay
The course of vengeance; for, look thou! three friars, sent to say
The mass and shrive our faithful sons, I now put under thee;
So, ere the savage brains the babe, let it baptizèd be!"

Then, with a hundred stanch canoes for easy transport made,
Silent and grim the army passed into the forest's shade;
O'er the lake's bosom, up swift streams, through strait defiles,
its way,
Like a huge python's sinuous trail, devious and hidden lay.

Meanwhile the English garrisons, from sea to last frontier,
Had kept strict watch, though knowing not the enemy were near.
At Deerfield fort a sentry saw, approaching from the wood,
A stranger in French uniform, who fired his gun, then stood.

"Halt! Who goes there?" aloud the sentry cried, and called the
guard.

"Or friend or foe, until ye speak step not another yard!"
Grounding his gun, and with his hand saluting, then spake he:
"*Pas ennemi, moi! mais Protestant, Huguenot, et bon ami!*"

"Open the gate," the captain cried, "and bring the stranger in!
If proved a spy and traitor, he shall suffer for his sin;
But, peradventure, he be sent an angel from the Lord,
He well deserves the choicest fare our scanty means afford.

"So bind him now as prisoner, and guard him night and day
Until we hear and verify whate'er he has to say!"
Smiling, the man held forth his limbs for manacles and gyves;
"Ay, put me to the test," he said; "I come to save your lives.

"Though all is quiet now, 't is but the calm before the storm ;
Not many miles away, yon woods with Beaucourt's cohort swarm ;
Five hundred braves and seven score French descend the Indian
trail,
Look out from every mountain top, and pass adown each vale.

"Five weeks ago from Montreal with them I came away,
Contriving, all the while, how I this warning might convey ;
For know ye that in Flanders, I, fighting in William's train,
Captured, was sold to Canada, to wear the captor's chain."

The prisoner's straight-told narrative was sent post-haste away,
To Winthrop at Connecticut and Dudley at the Bay.
Up from the southern border then came troops of volunteers,
To reinforce the garrison upon the west frontiers.

With Avery and Livingston, Moheags of friendly fame
Passed up ; to Lancaster went Tyng ; and How from Marlborough
came.

Ordered by Dudley, Tailer led his foot and horsemen forth
From out his Suffolk regiment, to scout both west and north.

So when Beaucourt's skilled pioneers, cautious and lynx-eyed, saw
The preparations everywhere, his ranks were struck with awe.
In vain the Sieur, to rally them, threatening and pledges tried ;
Despondency to panic turned, — they broke and scattered wide,

Saying, "Thee, Soldier of the Cross, thy saints have led astray !
Lo, this long line of forts full-manned completely blocks thy way !
Lo, moving ranks of horse and foot the whole wide border throng,
Close as the bluets in the swamp, or thorns in Le Buisson !"

Of their repulse at Lancaster the story's oft been told, —
 Their furious onset how withstood, their columns backward rolled ;
 Yet how one band, like famished wolves intent upon their prey,
 Pressed on with torch and scalping-knife to plunder, burn, and slay ;

And how they fired the meeting-house, and cut the orchards down,
 And burned the barns and homesteads, and the records of the town :
 The ghastly wounds their bullets made, — the dead, — the widows'
 wail, —

Our ancient chronicles record the melancholy tale.

Now weak, crestfallen, sick and sore, the vanquished ranks retrace
 Their progress through the wilderness back to their starting-place ;
 And such a march, — O God, to think how faint and famished fell
 Scores that from Hochelaga went buoyant and strong and well !

The last fat English horse and dog were eaten ere they marched ;
 Few grains of corn their pouches held, unbroken and half-parched ;
 Savory leaves and bark of trees, at intervals, among
 The oaks and pines they found, — but these soon palled upon the
 tongue.

No game the leafy desert held ; the startled deer had fled ;
 The bear, the moose, the caribou to northern haunts had sped ;
 But cawed o'erhead the carrion-crow, from dawn till afternoon,
 And, nightly, howled the hungry wolf back to the laughing loon.

The soldier and the habitant drooped, fainting, side by side, —
 One hailed the flag, one prayed, — both kissed the crucifix, and died.
 And all along their rugged way the frequent piles of stones
 Showed to the passing traveller where lay their crumbling bones.

At length the wretched remnant stand before their irate lord,
Vaudreuil, who Beaucourt in a dungeon cast, and broke his sword.
"Catiff," and "Coward," were the thanks the humbled soldier got:
Henceforth, degraded and despised, he lived to mourn his lot.

But from New England lips uprose the grateful prayer and psalm
To Him who saved the Israelites by his protecting arm
When Pharaoh's mighty hosts were drowned in the engulfing sea,
And Miriam's voice was lifted up in tuneful prophecy.

Short was the truce ere yet again the frightful warwhoop broke
The quiet of the far frontier: in blood and flame and smoke
Again the farms were wasted; and the holy Sabbath air
Rent by the sulphurous flash of guns and by the trumpet's blare.

Parent and child, the babe, the sire, were carried off or slain
Till after Wolfe and Montcalm fell, fighting, on Abraham's Plain,
And to the knell and muffled drum above their common pall
Were sealed the bonds of peace between the Briton and the Gaul.

And now our fathers' God we bless that all those strifes are past,
And pray that bonds of love and peace may henceforth ever last.
Quebec and Boston meet by rail, and under our free rule
Louis is master of highways, — Jeanne keeps the district school.

On those wild hills from which Beaucourt's battalions spread alarm
A young Beaucourt is felling trees, an Aubert tills his farm.
The gloomy covert of wild beasts lies open to the sun,
And to the hum of saw and loom its sparkling waters run.

No more the foe in ambush or on murderous raid is feared ;
The savage, fierce allies of France have long since disappeared
Save where, far west, the old Hurons have Wyandots become,
And remnant bands of Iroquois still haunt their ancient home ;

And half-breed Abenakis stay, and docile Montagnais
At Beauport sell their beaded wares and to the Virgin pray ;
And lo, in Boston domiciled, look down this board and see
How the Algonquins welcome us in this their grand tepee !



